

WellBeing International

WBI Studies Repository

Fall 1987

SERO Fall 1987

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/souearn>

Recommended Citation

"SERO Fall 1987" (1987). *Southeast Regional Office*. 8.
<https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/souearn/8>

This material is brought to you for free and open access by WellBeing International. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the WBI Studies Repository. For more information, please contact wbisr-info@wellbeingintl.org.





REPORT

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

FALL 1987

THE HSUS CHALLENGES ANIMAL SACRIFICE CULTS

The Southeast Regional Office of The Humane Society of the United States and the City of Hialeah have won a major battle to ensure that animal sacrifice does not become an accepted practice in Florida.

Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth has issued a formal opinion declaring the gruesome ritual of animal sacrifice, as practiced by the Santeria cult, illegal under the state's animal cruelty statutes. The opinion was prepared at the request of the Hialeah City Council, which is seeking to block the ritual killing of animals at the first public Santeria church in the United States. With the law on our side, the HSUS/SERO is pushing for the prosecution of all persons or groups who use live animals for ceremonial sacrifice.

Santeria blends the spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Yoruba tribe with the saints and rites of Catholicism. The two divergent beliefs were merged when slave

traders tried to force Christianity on blacks being transported to the Americas from Africa. African gods became identified with Christian saints of similar characteristics; for instance, Babalu-Aye, the Yoruba god of pestilence and disease, became identified in Santeria with the Catholic Saint Lazarus, who rose from the dead.

Santeria rituals, including the sacrifice of animals, have so far been held largely in secrecy. The results of the ceremonies, however, are much more visible. Be-headed and bloodless bodies of chickens, pigeons, sheep, and goats are found on a daily basis in neighborhoods, canals, alleys and graveyards throughout South Florida.

Santeria first came to the attention of The HSUS in the late 1970's. Our investigators and legal staff collected enough information to persuade Miami State Attorney Janet Reno to request a legal opinion from then-Attorney General

Jim Smith. Smith responded with an informal letter agreeing that animal sacrifice is prohibited in Florida. The Humane Society of Greater Miami thereafter joined with local police to investigate complaints and seize evidence involving ritual sacrifice. The cases were referred to Reno's office. Regardless, the state attorney never pursued the cases by prosecuting Santeria followers for the alleged crimes.

The cult's membership in the Miami area received a boost in 1980 when the

INSIDE

- Carriage Horse Abuse
- Cockfighting in Georgia
- The HSUS kicks off "Be A Pal" Campaign

Wild-Caught Birds Suffer And Die in Pet Trade

Over a million wild-caught birds are imported or illegally smuggled into the United States each year. For every one bird that survives capture, shipment, quarantine and confinement, about ten others will die, mostly due to brutal, inhumane capture methods, injuries, inadequate care or stress-related diseases. The birds frequently end up with human keepers without the knowledge or patience to properly care for them. For these reasons, The Humane Society of the United States is pushing for a ban on the importation of all wild birds for the pet trade.

A wild-caught bird's journey into the U.S. pet market begins in its homeland, where it is trapped by locals using a variety of methods including snares, large nets, sticky substances on perches, or the simple theft of nestlings in sheltered holes. The worst destruction comes when nesting trees are cut down in the hope some of the young birds will survive the fall. The birds are forced to wait in abysmal conditions for days, weeks, or months until a sufficient number have been collected. The survivors are then packed tightly into crates and transported with little or no food, water, or medical attention. Exporters aren't particularly concerned about the birds, injuries, or high mortality rates (regarded as the cost of doing business).

Wild-caught birds smuggled into the United States have an even higher mor-



A sacrificial offering to Chango, the Santeria god of fire and thunder. The pigeons' heads have been torn off and their blood splattered on the doll which represents Chango.

— The Miami Herald

(continued on page 2)

(continued inside)

SANTERIA

(continued from front page)

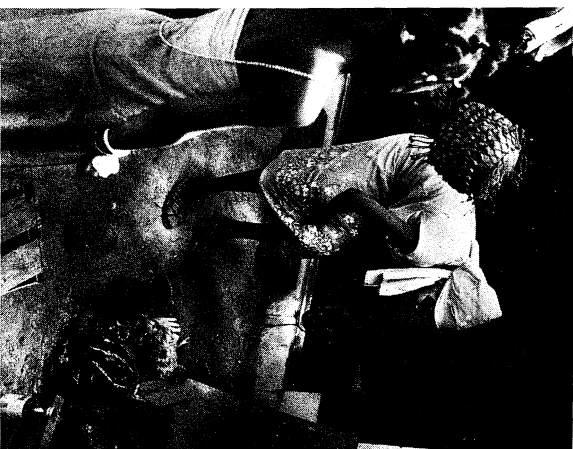
Maríel boatlift brought thousands of immigrants to the United States from Cuba. The cult has now spread and is said to have as many as 100,000 practitioners in South Florida alone.

A new urgency in the fight against animal sacrifice rituals arose with an announcement in May by cult leaders that they had purchased residential property in Hialeah for their first public church. The existing four-bedroom house is to be torn down and a church, school, and Afro-Cuban museum are proposed for the site. Plans also call for an on-site incinerator to burn the bodies of the sacrificial animals after Santería ceremonies.

For a few weeks, the City of Hialeah was successful in keeping the church doors closed because of code violations relating to the plumbing, electrical wiring, and the generally dilapidated condition of the structure. While the cult worked to correct the violations, services were held in the parking lot of the property. An occupancy permit has now been issued and the cult leader, Ernesto Pichardo, claims he will soon begin ritual animal sacrifice at the facility.

These developments do not sit well with local residents. Over 300 attended a city council meeting on June 9 dealing with Santería, and petitions with over 5,000 signatures were presented to council members. The community has made it clear it wants nothing to do with the cult.

Marc Paulhus, director of the Southeast Regional Office, drafted an ordi-



— The Miami Herald

Onlookers view the remains of a mutilated chicken killed in a cult ritual.

nance to ban animal sacrifice and presented it to the city council. City attorneys expressed concern that such a local law would conflict with state statutes. Paulhus disagreed. He suggested that the council seek an updated legal interpretation from the attorney general in order to resolve the dispute.

The opinion issued by Attorney General Bob Butterworth eliminates any legal question the city might have and clears the way for our ordinance recommendations to be adopted. Butterworth states very emphatically that Florida law prohibits the sacrificial killing of animals. This effectively countered arguments by cult members that their practices are protected under the U.S. Constitution's promise of freedom of religion.

The HSUS has long felt, and Butterworth concurs, that constitutional guarantees of religious freedom cover one's beliefs, but not always the practice of those beliefs if they are in conflict with state or federal laws upholding a compelling public interest such as the suppression of cruelty to animals. The courts have previously held illegal such practices as polygamy and ceremonial drug use even though the groups taking part in the activities claimed they were essential parts of their religion.

Santería leaders further claim they are within their rights to kill animals under ritual slaughter provisions in the Florida animal cruelty statutes. Butterworth has refused that argument, saying it applies only to livestock killed in licensed commercial slaughterhouses for the primary purpose of food consumption.

The action by Butterworth is a major step in the battle against Santería and all cults that believe they must mutilate and murder animals to appease their gods. The war is not over, however. Santería priest Ernesto Pichardo has vowed to continue the fight in the courts. Hialeah city officials and The HSUS/SERO will stand firmly opposed.

The cult will no doubt persist, but it will remain a religion out of the mainstream of society. Any tacit acceptance of the sacrificial killings will encourage a growth in the number of cults and followers across the United States and, consequently, an increase in the tens of thousands of animals forced to die for no purpose other than to be tortured, murdered, and tossed away for their life's blood.

Florida has come a long way in its efforts to stop cruelty to animals. We cannot take a step backward to accommodate a bloody cult whose practices clash with our modern society and civilized mores.

Director's Comment

by Marc Paulhus



To my knowledge, no animal in America has ever been the focus of such heated public debate as has the type of dog known as the pit bull terrier. It is scarcely possible to pick up the daily papers or watch the nightly news without encountering a sensational tale of pit bull savagery or devotion. On the basis of a single experience, a victim of a pit bull attack may describe all such dogs as mindless killers while an owner or breeder of the dogs will likely portray all pit bulls as gentle, loyal and intelligent family pets. The truth lies somewhere in between.

Any purebred or mongrel dog can bite, but some breeds have a greater propensity than others. Chow chows, German shepherds, cocker spaniels and American pit bull terriers are among the breeds known to bite more frequently than the average dog. Where pit bulls clearly stand out, however, is in the bite categories of greatest severity. So far in 1987, six of the seven reported human fatalities caused by dog bites involved pit bulls or pit bull crosses. It would be irresponsible to deny that a problem exists.

But wait. The pit bull is as much a victim as a threat. Bred over decades for the perverse entertainment of dogfighters, prized for their physical strength and biting power, the pit bull has emerged as a "macho" image dog. Though only a small number of owners may breed, train or encourage the dogs to be dangerously aggressive, these are the pit bulls which often cause the problems and make the headlines. The owners of gentle, family pit bull terriers are understandably distraught that the dog has received a bad reputation because of the actions of dogfighters, thugs, and misanthropes.

(continued on back page)

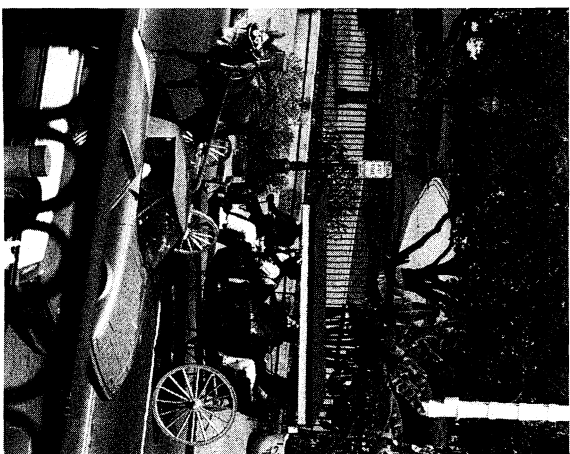
Region Seeks To End Carriage Horse Abuses

The historic city of St. Augustine, Florida, is taking another look at the carriage horse trade. The city has received numerous complaints over the years from residents and tourists concerned over the health and appearance of the horses. The city commission is finally considering whether local ordinances should be enacted to regulate the trade and further restrict the number of carriages that can operate in the city.

Currently, the city only requires that carriage horses be given a check-up by a veterinarian twice a year. No other rules govern the working conditions of the horses or protect them from long hours toiling under the hot Florida sun. The animals are forced to wait for fares while exposed to the elements, then have to pull a carriage loaded with up to 10 people on a 45-minute tour of the city.

Most of the time the horses walk or stand on blacktop asphalt, which soaks up the sun and increases the heat-stress. On a hot day, the temperature on the pavement can easily exceed 120°. At the same time, the horses are breathing in exhaust fumes from hundreds of passing cars. These conditions have led to complaints of carriage horses lathered in sweat, overworked, and lethargic.

One carriage horse operator excused the debilitated appearance of his animals by claiming they were about 30 years old (the average life expectancy of horses is 25). Some of these animals have apparently been retired but others still face the daily burden of hauling carriage and passengers around.



— Ernest Alexander III

Carriage horses share the same busy streets as cars and buses.

So far, St. Augustine has been lucky. No major accidents between carriages and motorized vehicles vying for space on the same streets have occurred. The carriage, its occupants, and the horse are always vulnerable to the threat of collision, though, and are certain to fare badly against several thousand pounds of metal. Indeed, other cities across the U.S. have reported injuries or fatalities involving carriage horses and passengers as a consequence of traffic accidents. Other times, the horses have dropped from exhaustion or heat stroke and died in the streets.

The Humane Society of the United States would like to see all carriage horses in urban areas phased out entirely. Barring that, strict regulations should be adopted to ensure the safety and health of the horses.

On July 8, Laura Bevan, program coordinator for the Southeast Regional Office, met with carriage horse operators and city officials in St. Augustine to discuss our concerns. Bevan outlined seventeen separate regulatory proposals that, if adopted, would measurably improve the working conditions for carriage horses and minimize the hazards they are exposed to. The following were our principal recommendations:

- No carriage operations during mid-day periods when the temperature exceeds 80° or during peak rush hours.
- No more than four hours of daily work per horse.
- Potable drinking water available to the horses at their passenger pickup point and at the midpoint of the route.
- A maximum of four adult passengers per carriage.
- No horse exceeding 20 years in age to be used.
- Carriages must be kept off major thoroughfares to reduce the possibility of vehicular accidents.
- Use of horses should be phased out in favor of draft mules which possess generally greater strength and higher heat tolerance.

Only under these conditions can The HSUS warily accept the carriage horse trade in cities where it already exists. Urban areas considering allowing the industry should think again. The sight of an unhealthy, overburdened horse struggling to pull crowds of people around hot city streets is not the image any city should want its citizens or tourists to see and remember.

— The Georgia Bureau of Investigations



The results of a cockfight raided by the Georgia Bureau of Investigations in Byron. Losing birds always die, as do many of the winners.

Cockfighting: Time to End Heinous "Sport"

A campaign to drive cockfighting from the state has been initiated by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). A raid conducted last June in Byron resulted in the arrest of eight people on charges of felony commercial gambling, and misdemeanor counts of cruelty to animals and gambling. Forty other men, women and children were at the site, but were not charged with any crime. Confiscated in the raid were over twenty roosters (two of which died shortly thereafter from injuries sustained in the fight), a large sum of money, weapons and drugs. GBI agent Jack White says this is just the beginning of a crackdown on the sport by his agency.

The Byron raid has stirred up a heated debate in middle Georgia between those who see the blood sport as family entertainment and those who view it as cruelty to animals. The HSUS/SERO believes those who use animals for their own barbaric amusement should be punished through stiff fines and jail terms.

The roosters used in cockfighting are bred and raised for the sole purpose of dying in the pit during a gory combat in which they battle their opponent with 1½ to 3 inch gaffs, or curved steel spikes, attached in place of the bird's natural spurs. The roosters almost always die, either in the pit or soon after. When the birds are too weak to put up a good fight they are transferred to a "drag pit" to continue the battle until one or both are dead.

Roosters taken in raids by law enforcement agencies are doomed by their own breeding. The confiscated birds

(continued on next page)

cannot be adopted out because of their inbred aggressiveness. They present a problem when being held in custody because they have to be housed in separate cages to keep them from attacking one another. Those euthanized must be incinerated or buried deep in the ground because many cockfighters feed their birds strychnine, believing it will give them added stamina in the pit. The presence of poison in the birds makes them unsuitable for consumption by man or animal.

GBI agent White says the current difficulty in battling cockfighting is the lack of strict laws prohibiting it. White contends it can be hard to justify the time, manpower, and expense of a cockfighting investigation when only a misdemeanor crime is involved. He will support any legislative action to upgrade cockfighting to a felony in Georgia.

The SERO has worked with the GBI in the past and ranks the organization as the most professional state agency in this region, with the strongest commitment to eliminating illegal animal-fighting activities. Cockfighting is prevalent throughout the Southeast, but few law enforcement agencies in these states have made a concerted effort to ferret out clandestine blood sports and prosecute violators to the fullest extent of the law. Hats off to the Georgia Bureau of Investigations!



—The Georgia Bureau of Investigations

These three-inch surgical steel gaffs are instruments of death in the cockfighting pit.

Be a Pal



Willard Scott and pals

Photo: Peter Guffey

Prevent a Litter

SPAY OR NEUTER YOUR PET.



The Humane Society of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20037

Famed TV weatherman Willard Scott has lent his name to The HSUS "Be a Pal" campaign. Contact the Southeast Regional Office for information on ordering posters.

THE HSUS TACKLES PET OVERPOPULATION

The Humane Society of the United States has designated April as "Be a Pal—Prevent a Litter" month, though our efforts will not be limited to that month. From now until April, we are urging animal shelters across the country to intensify their efforts to promote responsible pet ownership and especially the spaying or neutering of pets.

In recent years there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of animals euthanized in animal shelters, from 14 million to less than 8 million animals annually. That is still too many, but it is encouraging to know that positive progress is being made.

The PAL program is not designed only for animal shelters, though. All HSUS members and friends are invited to take part in this important campaign to stop animal suffering. You can help by obtaining PAL posters and distributing them throughout your community in schools, libraries, public halls, grocery stores, or anywhere that they may be seen by numbers of people.

You too can prevent a litter, you too can be a PAL!

WILD CAUGHT BIRDS

(continued from front page)

tality rate than legally imported birds. Often they are drugged with substances like tranquilizers or even tequila, and trussed up to prevent noise or movement. If the birds accidentally breathe in tequila and even a small amount enters their airsacs, they can drown. The taping of the beak, wings and feet can lead to fatal injuries and more often, to suffocation. Birds smuggled into this country from Mexico are found in tire wells, luggage, clothing and food containers. Entire shipments, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, may be dead on arrival. It is impossible to pin down a reliable estimate of smuggled bird numbers, but government sources concede that fewer than ten percent of smuggled birds are detected by authorities.

Smuggled birds that are found and confiscated and all legally imported birds also have to withstand the rigors of quarantine stations. They are confined there for thirty days under conditions that range from acceptable to



Due to inhumane transport conditions, shipments of birds often arrive dead.

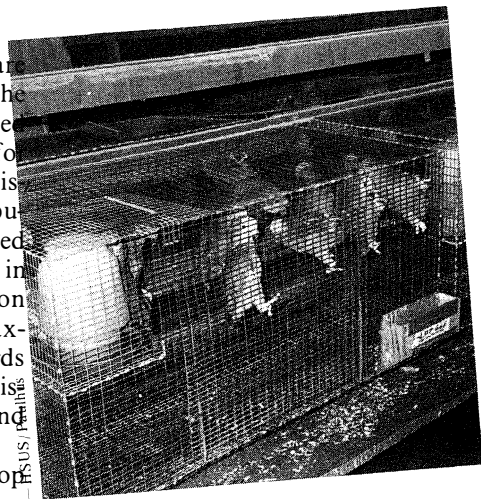
deplorable—depending on who owns and maintains the quarantine facility. During a recent inspection tour of quarantine stations along the Texas-Mexico border, SERO Director Marc Paulhus discovered clean conditions and relatively knowledgeable personnel at the USDA-operated facility in Mission, Texas. Such was not the case at a privately owned bird quarantine station in another Texas border town. There, more than fifteen hundred birds, mostly unfledged babies, were kept in three small rooms. As many as thirty birds were caged together in unsanitary conditions with only one perch per cage. One of the workers removed dead birds from among the cages, cradling more than a dozen in her arms until a trash receptacle could be located.

Sadly, bird quarantine stations are absolutely essential to safeguard the public health and safety. The imported birds must be observed and checked for diseases such as Exotic Newcastle Disease which can devastate poultry populations. From 1971 to 1973, one infected parrot caused outbreaks of Newcastle in California that required the destruction of 12 million chickens, at a cost to taxpayers of 56 million dollars. Wild birds can also transmit to humans such diseases as tuberculosis, psittacosis and salmonella.

All too frequently wild birds develop stress-related disorders from the unnatural conditions they are forced to live under after capture and sale. Some birds become so neurotic they begin to mutilate themselves by plucking their feathers, or in some cases, biting their own toes. Others destroy furniture, screech continuously, bite people or refuse to tame down, often leading to a succession of owners. Birds who normally have long life spans in the wild may only survive months or a few years in captivity. Many premature deaths are the result of nutritional disorders caused by an unchanging and inadequate seed diet.

The inherent abuse and cruelty of the wild bird trade has not gone unnoticed by the international community. Most countries, including the U.S., do not allow the capture and sale of their own native birds. More than half of the countries in Latin America now prohibit wildlife exports. Mexico stopped issuing export permits several years ago, though it continues to be a major source of smuggled birds. Australia considers some of its cockatoo species to be agricultural pests and allows limited killing of the birds, but the country refuses to allow them to be exported. It believes the pet trade is far more destructive and inhumane.

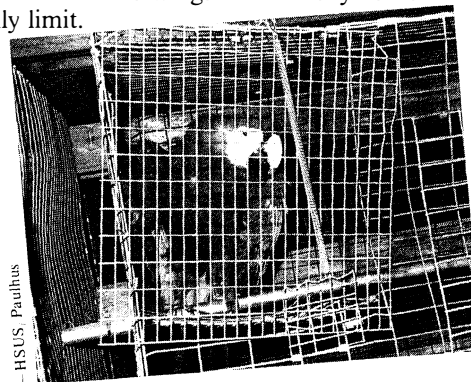
Only seven countries provide 65 percent of the bird exports to the United States, with Senegal accounting for 35 percent of the total number. Belgium and Argentina are the next largest exporters to this country, but their trade includes wild birds sometimes taken illegally from countries where they are protected. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) voted in 1976 to encourage all countries to ban the capture of wild animals for the commercial pet trade. Closer to home, New York State already bans the sale of all wild-caught birds as pets. Bird breeders are regulated and only captive-bred birds identified by leg bands may be sold.



Smuggled birds await public auction in this Texas USDA quarantine station.

Despite the cruelties of the wild bird trade, a U.S. import ban faces heavy opposition. The pet industry, breeders and exporters all have a powerful economic interest in keeping the status quo. The total retail bird industry rang up gross sales of 229 million dollars in 1984. From exporter to final seller, those involved receive profits of 60 percent at every level. Though millions of birds die, overshipping and high prices guarantee a profit. Only a total bird importation ban would break this cycle of cruelty for profit.

There are enough breeders now to fill the need for all appropriate pet bird species. Birds bred in captivity are healthier, friendlier and more compatible as pets than their wild counterparts. Every purchase of a wild-caught bird contributes to the problem and ensures that the wild-bird trade and all its cruelties will continue and flourish. Every wild-caught bird confined now to a cage, should remind us that it once had the world under its wings and the sky as its only limit.



This scarlet macaw, an endangered species, was smuggled into Texas from Honduras aboard a U.S. military transport. It was scheduled to be sold, in violation of federal regulations, until The HSUS intervened. It has now been placed in a zoo breeding program.

Around the Region

■ **ALABAMA**—Humane organizations lost their bid to strengthen Alabama's animal cruelty laws but are making plans to reintroduce the legislation next year. The bill would increase the maximum sentence that could be imposed on persons convicted of cruelty to animals and give police officers broader discretion to seize an animal that has been neglected or abused.

■ **FLORIDA**—The HSUS/SERO was effective in strengthening current animal-protection and control laws this past legislative session, while effectively blocking an attempt to weaken "The Animal Fighting Act". A seemingly harmless amendment to the law proposed by State Representative Arnhilda Gonzalez-Quevedo of Coral Gables would have made cockfighting legal once again in Florida. Fortunately, our opposition helped defeat the bill in committee.

State law will now give humane societies and animal-control agencies greater flexibility to investigate cruelty and neglect cases. Florida Statute 828.073, a civil law which authorizes the seizure of mistreated animals, was amended to permit investigating agencies to present additional testimony and evidence relating to a defendant's fitness to own animals. The new law also provides for the courts to order payment by the owner for the costs of caring for any animals seized pending a hearing or trial.

■ **GEORGIA**—The first statewide organization of humane societies, animal-control agencies and animal-rights groups has been created. The Georgia Coalition for Animal Protection will provide training for shelter personnel and technical assistance to local groups and individuals on animal related issues. Assistance will be available for those conducting animal cruelty investigations throughout the state. SERO is working with the Coalition and State Representative Chesley Morton to introduce a bill promoting sodium pentobarbital, or its derivatives, as the preferred method of euthanasia at animal shelter facilities. The proposal specifically outlaws such atrocities as death by poison, gunshot, or electrocution.

The city of Waycross is taking steps to improve its animal-control program. Waycross, once known for electrocuting its unwanted animals, has now agreed

to turn over the operation of its shelter to a newly formed humane society. The group plans on remodeling the facility and expanding its programs to better serve the community.

■ **SOUTH CAROLINA**—Florence police have made the first arrests for dogfighting under the state's new felony law. Law enforcement and local humane society officials raided a fight and confiscated five adult and six young pit bull dogs. Six people attending the fight have been charged with animal fighting and baiting, which carries a maximum penalty of a five thousand dollar fine and/or five years in jail.

The Florence animal shelter and persons involved in the raid are facing harassment from dogfighting supporters in the area. The shelter has been broken into and vandalized several times. These intimidation ploys have not shaken the resolve of police and shelter officials who are standing firm in their efforts to abolish the blood sport from South Carolina.

Welcome Aboard

We are pleased to introduce two new additions to our staff.

Andrea Mitchell has joined us in the position of Secretary/Receptionist. Her responsibilities include a multitude of office and membership service functions.

Laura Bevan has filled the position of Program Coordinator. Her assignments will include legislative activities, program implementation, publicity and public relations.

Director's Comment (continued)

The HSUS has been working to put the issue in proper perspective. I have stressed to the national media, on programs such as ABC's NIGHTLINE, and to state and local government entities that the solution is not to ban the ownership of pit bull terriers, but to wage all-out war on dogfighters and others who breed or harbor any dog that has shown dangerous or vicious propensities. Strong anti-dogfighting laws already exist in all southeastern states, but they have not been effectively enforced. Local animal-control agencies need better ordinances which enable dangerous animals to be identified and their owners made responsible for the actions of their pets.



Reflect for a moment....

HOW CAN I HELP ANIMALS EVEN WHEN I NO LONGER SHARE THEIR WORLD?

By your bequest for animal protection to The Humane Society of the United States.

Your will can provide for animals after you're gone.

Naming The HSUS demonstrates your lasting commitment to animal welfare and strengthens the Society for this task. We will be happy to send information about our animal programs and material that will assist in planning a will.

Please send will information to

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

ZIP code _____

Mail in confidence to Murdaugh S. Madden, Vice President/General Counsel, The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037.

The Regional Report is a publication of

**The Humane Society of the United States
Southeast Regional Office**

325 John Knox Road

Bldg. F., Suite 228

Tallahassee, FL 32303

(904) 386-3435

Marc Paulhus, Director

The Humane Society of the United States is a charitable, tax-exempt, national animal-welfare organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C., regional field offices, and an education center in Connecticut.